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Document in relation to the expediency of increasing the military defences of the country.

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IN RELATION TO

The expediency of increasing the military defences of the country.

MARCH 25, 1846.
Ordered to be printed.

WAR DEPARTMENT,
December 29, 1845.

SIR: I herewith return to you the resolution which you sent to me on the 23d instant. The recommendations in my report to the President of the 29th ultimo have reference to a permanent peace establishment. Under any circumstances, I am convinced that our seacoast and northern frontier should have a larger force stationed on them than they now have, or the department can now place there by any proper disposition it can make of the regular army at this time. The number of troops now in Texas cannot, under present circumstances, be lessened. There ought not to be less, indeed I think there should be more, troops on the Indian frontier. Should the suggestions in the report, to increase the rank and file of companies to sixty-eight or eighty-four privates, be approved by Congress and carried out, there would be a disposable regular force for the forts and fortifications on the seaboard and northern and western frontiers; but this force would not furnish adequate garrisons in case of an apprehended attack. Besides, it would require some months to raise the men, incorporate them in the old regiments, and get them in position. Should this suggestion meet with favor, I still think that authority should be given to the President to accept the services of volunteer companies, squadrons, battalions, regiments, and State troops, for a term not exceeding one year. Our situation may be such that, for the mere purpose of defence, these volunteer troops or militia, to the number of fifty thousand, may be needed. Under the direction of the Executive, the number actually received would be regulated by circumstances. The present fortifications on the seaboard, as well as temporary defences, which must be resorted to in case of threatened hostilities, must be garrisoned; and the number I have mentioned, in addition to our regular force, unless it was greatly increased, would certainly not be more than sufficient to put the country in a reasonable state of security in case of a war with Great Britain. On the northern frontier, where there are now stationed only about four hundred and eighty men, provision should be made for placing, on the shortest notice, a force equal to that in Canada, which could be brought to assail that frontier if hostilities from that quarter should be reasonably apprehended. There are at this time about seven thousand regular British troops in that province. I should prefer, in case it was necessary to call in the aid of the militia for
the defence of the country, to obtain the troops required by the accept-
ce of volunteers rather than by the present mode of making a requisi-
tion on the executives of the States, and leaving it to them to raise the
number required by draughts, &c.; though it is probable that in most in-
stances the number required by the latter mode would be volunteers.
Volunteers would be likely to do more effective service when first called
out, than draughted militiamen. I would respectfully refer you to the acts
of Congress on this subject. [See vol. 9, U. S. Laws, chap. 470, session
of 1836; chap. 1219, session of 1839.]

In relation to raising additional regiments, I refer you to my views as
expressed in my report to the President, and by him sent to Congress.
In reference to a peace establishment, I would recommend two new reg-
iments, if the suggestion to increase the rank and file of the present com-
panies should not be favorably received. In the present aspect of our for-
ign affairs, this mode of augmenting the regular force of the country com-
mands itself to my judgment. These regiments, should they be raised,
are to be in addition to the troops proposed to be raised to garrison the
chain of posts to the Rocky mountains.

With this communication I send to you a statement from the general
commanding the army, containing his views of the number of troops re-
quired to man the fortifications, &c.

With a view to give you full and authentic information in regard to the
several matters embraced in the resolution which you sent to me, I have
required statements from the Engineer and Ordnance Bureaus, and here-
with transmit them to you. It is, in my opinion, important that the in-
formation, in all its details, as set forth in these documents, should not be
made public. I trust the committee will concur in the propriety of this
suggestion.

I forbear to reiterate the suggestions in the report of the Chief Engi-
eer, in regard to the fortifications, temporary defences, &c., but commend
them to the favorable consideration of the committee. The appropriations
which he suggests are large, but not more so than the safety of the coun-
try requires in the contingencies he contemplates. The increased ex-
penditure upon permanent works is an outlay that must be made in the
course of a very few years, and, in my judgment, sound policy indicates
that it should be in the power of the government to expend immediately,
what, under other circumstances, might be allotted to such objects for two
or three years. It will be recollected that the costs of the permanent
works will not be increased by accelerating the completion of them. The
same remarks are also applicable to the expenditures for armaments, ord-
inance stores, &c. But, if it should be deemed inexpedient by the com-
mittee to present to Congress, at this time, the large appropriations sug-
gested in the reports of the Chief Engineer and the officer at the head of
the Ordnance Bureau, or if there would be likely to be a considerable de-
lay in getting a bill, making such appropriations, through Congress, I
would respectfully recommend that the appropriations for fortifications
and for armaments and munitions of war, asked for in the estimates al-
ready submitted from this department, should be granted without delay,
and that the restriction which confines the expenditure of them to the
fiscal year should be so far removed as to allow a resort to them at once.

It is considered important that the work on forts and fortifications
should be prosecuted with vigor, and at the earliest practicable period;
and that the department should know what means it can command in the course of a few months, that it may forthwith make preparatory arrangements for using them. It is equally important that it should be at once apprized of the means which will be placed at its disposal for the armament, ordnance stores, &c., now wanting to make up a full supply. Considerable time is required to fabricate heavy ordnance, &c., and preparations cannot be safely made in anticipation of the necessary appropriations. Some of the materials require to be provided several years before they are in the best condition for use. The estimates for fortifications, &c., already made, have exclusive reference to permanent works, some of them not begun, and others in no state of forwardness. With all practicable dispatch, it will require more than a year to complete them. Should the points they are designed to cover and protect be threatened, the defence of them will depend on temporary works, and these will require considerable expense. For these, no estimate has been submitted. The precise character of these temporary defences cannot be designated, nor can it be now determined where they will be wanted. I would recommend that a considerable sum for these purposes should be placed at the discretion of the Executive. If not needed, it would not be used. In my opinion, two or three hundred thousand dollars might properly be appropriated for these objects. In case of war, or threatened attack, a much larger sum would be necessary.

Very respectfully, your obedient servant,

W. L. MARCY,
Secretary of War.

Hon. THOMAS H. BENTON,
Chairman Committee on Military Affairs, Senate.